

Protocol for Council Decision-Making During Covid-19 Outbreak – 06-04-20

1) Preamble

This Protocol sets out the interim arrangements for decision-making agreed by Group Leaders, that will be followed during the period of the Covid-19 civil emergency, subject to review at each monthly meeting of Group Leaders.

The overriding objective is to safeguard the health of Councillors, officers and members of the public by taking steps to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus.

It is essential that the HCC is readily able to continue its operations and in particular the work of the council in supporting and protecting vulnerable residents within its administrative area. Councillors play a central role in decision-making and it is these arrangements will enable continued involvement of councillors in the oversight of this process where possible whilst balancing the overriding object of safeguarding health.

Meetings of councillors are a core component of the council's existing decision-making process and in order to reduce the risk of transmission, meetings of councillors physically present in the same meeting room will be reduced to the minimum absolutely necessary to ensure that council's business may proceed. This will be achieved by utilising virtual or partly virtual meetings in accordance with the 'Regulations'¹ for dealing with those matters which it is considered cannot be dealt with other than by a meeting of councillors.

All other decisions will be dealt with by the Leader, Chief Executive and the Directors under their delegated authority including any powers arising in circumstances of 'urgency' and/or 'civil emergency' of which a pandemic is clearly an example. The exercise of such delegated decision-making is subject to Annex 3 of the Constitution which includes the requirements for engaging/consulting/informing councillors and for pre and post decision publicity.

2) Full Council

Where it is necessary to convene a meeting of Full Council this will be done using virtual meeting arrangements.

3) Cabinet

This meeting will continue to be held as diarised but using virtual meeting arrangements. The agendas will contain only those items which the Leader in consultation with Group Leaders, considers is not appropriate to be dealt with under officer delegation.

4) Group Leaders Meeting

These meetings will continue to be held using virtual meeting arrangements and will be scheduled to take place in the run up to Special Cabinet Panels and in the week preceding Full Council.

5) Cabinet Panels

¹ The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392

All Cabinet Panels are currently cancelled until further notice and in order to provide a forum for councillors from all party groups a **Special Cabinet Panel**, (SCP), will be established and convened in sequence with and in advance of Cabinet. The SCP will be comprised of 12 councillors in proportion to their political groups, to be nominated by Group Leaders on a rolling basis.

The agenda for SCP shall consist of a selection of the matters in the agendas/forward plans of all Cabinet Panels to be agreed between the Leader and Group Leaders. In advance of the Group Leaders meeting Democratic Services will circulate to Group Leaders a list of matters on the forward plan and canvas views on which should be included on the SCP agenda.

6) Other Committees

As regards other meetings such as Audit Committee, Development Control, Health & Wellbeing Board, the Chairman in consultation with the Political Group Spokespersons shall decide whether the meeting will be cancelled and decisions taken by officer delegation. Such consultation to be undertaken via email.

In the event that matters cannot be dealt with under officer delegation a virtual meeting will be convened and held via video link/telecon.

7) Decision-Making by the Leader

The Leader of the Council may take any Executive Decision where urgency/expediency dictate that virtual or partly virtual Cabinet meeting is not appropriate.

8) Decision-making by Chief Executive

The Chief Executive shall exercise delegated decision-making powers where this is necessary due to 'urgency' or 'Civil Emergency'— and in consultation with the Leader and other relevant councillors as necessary and/or appropriate.

9) Attendance of Press and Public

Key decisions, including those to be taken by officers, will continue to be published on the forward plan and officer decision notices will be published in accordance with the access to information rules contained in the constitution. Agendas and reports for virtual meetings will be published on the council's website as usual.

In accordance with 'Regulations' meetings of the council whether virtual or partly virtual will continue to be 'open to the press and public' through remote means such as live webcast or live interactive streaming and until further notice, physical attendance at meetings by press and public will be suspended in the interests of reducing the risk of virus transmission.

David Williams
Leader of the Council

Stephen Giles-Medhurst
Lib Dem Group Leader

Judi Billing
Labour Group Leader